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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9237
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS KINSHASA 000175

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - FEBRUARY 24

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Security Situation in North Kivu

¶2. (SBU) MONUC reported at least two firefights between joint FARDC-RDF forces and FDLR troops February 21 and 22 at Kashebere and Mukenge.

¶3. (SBU) RDF troops began withdrawing troops from select positions February 21 and the withdrawals continue as of February 24. Truckloads of Rwandan troops were reported on the Gisenyi-Kigali road. MONUC contacts estimate it will not be possible to have all RDF troops out of North Kivu by the date of the withdrawal ceremony on February 25. In one area near the border with Rwanda, MONUC reports that a fresh battalion of Rwandan troops appears to have rotated in to replace a withdrawing battalion.

¶4. (SBU) MONUC and FARDC troops travelled February 21-22 to the tiny village of Shizano, six kilometers west of Bunagana, to seize a reported weapons cache. CNDP troops who expressed loyalty for arrested leader Laurent Nkunda stalled the coalition troops, who eventually found the location of the alleged cache. It had been emptied of weapons, presumably, according to MONUC, while the CNDP Nkunda loyalists stalled the MONUC-FARDC patrol.

¶5. (SBU) USAID DART team reports that between February 16 and 20, FARDC forces, composed predominantly of recently CNDP-integrated soldiers, obstructed commercial transport between Bihambwe and Mushake on the Sake-Masisi axis, demanding cash and fuel from transporters.

Humanitarian Situation in North Kivu

¶6. (SBU) According to OCHA, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to visit Goma on February 27.

GARVELINK